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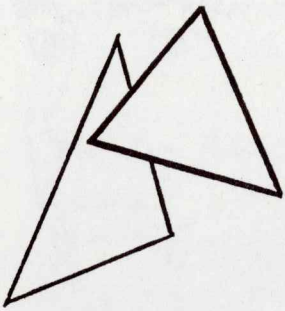

1955

Printed Under the Auspices of

Sir George Williams College

Literary Society

Drawing by Tevia Abramovitch

Associate Professor Neil Compton

to whom this

first magazine

is dedicated

EDITOR - IN - CHIEF TREVOR GOODGER-HILL

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editorial:

In a recent essay by Randall Jarrell, the modern American poet, he reluctantly admits that forty-eight percent of the American populace does not read one book per year. *This figure, based upon a recent survey by an eminent American university, depicts the reading habits of the American population. If, because of our close geographical position and binding cultural ties, we take this statement to reflect the reading habits of Canadians; then it would be advisable to explore this particular affliction more closely.*

When we consider the mass publication and the rapid absorption of the twenty-five and fifty-cent pocket thriller, the staggering sales of horror and crime comic books (not always bought by juvenile deliquents), and the innumerable romance and movie magazines by approximately one-half *the Canadian public, we might well wonder whether Canada is the 'sick man' of the western world. Is there, in Canada, a respectably-sized, thinking, reading public capable of understanding, or even bothering to read such men as James Joyce or A.M. Klein? The answer, I believe, is obvious.*

Yet, if our country, now in a critical economic, social, and political period, is ever to produce a Dante, a Shakespeare, or a Whitman, there must be a radical change in the consumption of the educated reader. Most modern literary critics would agree that a poet or writer, to produce his best work, must have an audience intelligent and willing to read and understand what he has to say. At such a time a writer can reach the eminence of these three. Dante wrote for the sophisticated, intelligent society of the Italian renaissance; Shakespeare for the discerning theatre-goers of Elizebethan England; and Whitman for the future generations of America. Each had something vital to say, but each also had someone to whom he could say it.

In these turbulent times with the clash of capitalistic, communistic and socialistic ideologies, the waning of Christianity and its subsequent division into new sects, and the awakening of a powerful Asia, our writers have much to say. At the same time there is no doubt that we need to progress intellectually to offset and stabilize the giddying scientific and technological strides of the past decade. We must read and comprehend without a shadow of prejudice, if we are to make the necessary decisions. And yet, even though we know this to be veracious, we continually ignore the offer our artists extend to us. We cannot condemn our authors or poets for this dilemma in which we seem *to be inextricably immersed. The blame lies upon ourselves, our laziness, our apathy towards anything that 'smacks' of intellectualism. The remedy also lies with us.*

tgh

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

During the past year the Literary Society of Sir George Williams College has planned a programme of guest speakers. Among those who have lectured at the meetings are Associate Professor Neil Compton and Mr. Irving Layton. "Prism" is proud to be able, in conjunction with the Literary Society, to present to the student body their speeches in abreviated form.

Associate Professor Neil Compton has, in his essay, selected one important section of his illustrated lecture on art; that is, the change that art, particularly the novel, has undergone in the last one hundred years. The Editorial Board regrets that due to the lack of space available it has been unable to reprint in its entirety the whole of Mr. Compton's enlightening and poignant address.

Following Mr. Compton's address, is an edited speech which was recently delivered by Mr. Irving Layton to the Literary Society. Unfortunately we are unable to reproduce the many examples of poetry with which Mr. Layton liberally illustrated his lecture; but where ever possible, we have endeavoured to maintain the uniqueness and force of his delivery.

neil compton

SOME ASPECTS OF LITERATURE: 1850 - 1950

"Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes of the shivering little prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds."

"riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodious vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.

Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselse to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuartpeatrick: not yet, though venissoon after, had a kidscad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all's fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.

The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy."

The first quotation comes from the first page of Dickens' *Bleak*

House, published in 1852. The second is the opening of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake,* first published in 1939. The purpose of both passages is similar — to establish the mood and theme of the works they introduce — but it is hardly necessary to observe that the resemblance stops at that point.

It is perhaps unfair to quote so mysterious a passage as that from *Finnegan's Wake* without venturing an interpretation, but I have juxtaposed Dickens and Joyce in this way, merely to establish the fact that a major revolution in literary technique took place between 1852 and 1939. The same point might be made in relation to music if we were to compare a quartet by Brahms (1833-1897) with one by Bartok (1881-1945); or, in relation to art, if we compared a painting by Corot (1796-1875) with one by Picasso (1881-). The purpose of this talk is to suggest, very sketchily, why art should have undergone such an extraordinary transformation — so extraordinary that the "man in the street" (if there is such a person) can display only blank incomprehension when confronted by typical examples of modern achievement in painting, music or literature. What has happened?

The passage from *Bleak House* is the work of a man who has not lost confidence in his environment. Though Dickens emphasizes the ugly or sordid aspects of urban life, he peoples the landscape with human beings, who go about their daily tasks in relative harmony with their surroundings. If the passage is a bit short on verbs, the impressions are nevertheless conveyed in an orderly grammatical pattern. There is never any doubt about the "meaning", and the author is so far from intending ambiguities that he has deliberately subordinated every detail to the overwhelming evocation of fogginess.

By contrast, everything is ambiguous in *Finnegan's Wake* and all the meanings are multiple. The details of the first paragraph are mainly drawn from the topography of Dublin, but they are meant to do more than set a scene. "riverrun" is both the first word in the novel and the continuation of the last sentence. (The book ends "a long the.") *Finnegan's Wake* thus has no beginning and no end; its form is circular. "riverrun" also suggests the endless flow of time, a major theme of the novel. "Eve and Adam's" recalls the dawn of human history and the "fall" which is mentioned in the third paragraph, as well as referring to an actual church called "Adam and Eve's" on the banks of the Liffey near Dublin. "Commodious vicus of recirculation" describes the course of the river, and introduces the Latin form of the name of Giovanni Battista Vico (1688-1744), whose

theory of history as a cyclical process ("recirculation") influenced Joyce. In the following paragraph are references to the story of Tristan (Tristram) and Iseult whose guilty love ("violer d'amores") is punned into association with a musical instrument (viola d'amore), to the story of Jacob, Esau and Isaac ("venissoon", "kidscad"), to Jonathan Swift's friend Vanessa ("vanessy"), to Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer ("topsawyer"), to . . . but this is perhaps enough to establish the differences between the technique of Dickens and Joyce.

Now it is my belief that *Finnegan's Wake* is a gigantic failure — a magnificent one, too, worth dozens of more conventionally successful works — and that it symbolizes a withdrawal from life. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid asking the question: Why did Joyce feel impelled to write in such a different manner from Dickens? A satisfactory answer to this question would place me high in the ranks of contemporary prophets, so I hope that I shall be forgiven if my tentative suggestions seem less than adequate.

The passage from Dickens assumes both a "reality" which exists independently of either author or reader, and a system of values which they share in common. In *Finnegan's Wake* Joyce creates a "reality" of his own, and establishes his own patterns of relationship within it. In the world of Dickens' novels, there is such a thing as "objective fact"; in the world of *Finnegan's Wake* objectivity has no meaning.

One explanation for the difference is that between Dickens' time and Joyce's, a technological revolution took place. The rate of cultural change used to be so slow as to be hardly perceptible. To-day however, every decade brings some important alteration in our environment. Within the lifetime of our fathers, automobiles, machine guns, plastics, atom bombs, oil furnaces, electric mixers, radios, television, rockets — the list is almost inexhaustible — have all made their impact upon the western world. The revolution in communication techniques, alone, has made possible megapolitan cities, monolithic states, gargantuan corporations and periodicals whose circulations number in the tens of millions. It has brought into suspicious and embarassed proximity nations which, a hundred years ago, were hardly aware of one another's existence.

Enough people are professionally engaged in pointing out the undoubted blessings of this development. Our concern is with the less desirable consequences. The dynamic energy released and encouraged by technological development has acquired a self-perpetuating impetus of its own, which is not amenable to control by the traditional

social pressures. Change has become a vested interest the least sinister manifestation of which is the automobile manufacturer's anxiety that we should never never drive a car which is more than two years old.

Now the capacity of the human organism to adjust to change, though considerable, is limited. Long ago, in his essay on Coleridge, John Stuart Mill (the very fountainhead of modern liberalism) pointed out that every man needs some rooted loyalty, some principle of permanence, if his response to life is to be meaningful and integrated. Most modern media of mass communication exist for the prime purpose of eradicating such attitudes. Since those who control them regard human beings as objects to be manipulated for the purpose of profit, their aim is to keep people on the move, both physically and spiritually, and so to serve the interests of expanded production (regarded as a good in itself) and fluidity both of market and labour force. There is no activity in such ill repute to-day as contemplation.

The continual re-adjustment required of anyone who lives in a large modern city constitutes, for those who attempt to keep their heads above the stream, an almost intolerable psychic strain; while, for those who are content to move with the crowd, it leads to the dissipation of communal ties, the loss of contact with healthy and natural modes of living. The organic community has given way to the anonymity of megapolis, and it is no accident that a sociological classic of our time is called *The Lonely Crowd.*

In spite of these facts; in spite of the revelation that the techniques of "civilization" can be turned to such barbarous uses as genocide, concentration camps and atomic warfare, the dominant philosophical tradition of our time continues to be liberal — that is, founded upon an optimistic assessment of man and his destiny. (For the sake of the record, I should, perhaps, say that, on the whole, I share this attitude.) If we turn to the characteristic artists of our time, however, we find that they tend to be pessimists and "reactionaries". They are prophets who remind us that the rosy visions of liberalism can only come true if we stop the rot which is destroying the foundations upon which all human achievement has hitherto been reared. Most of them do not believe that we will heed the warning. While the newspapers tell us of the brave new world of the day after to-morrow (which, of course, never comes), while we are told that untold mineral riches will make Canada a "great nation", W.B. Yeats insists that

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of a passionate intensity."

He sees "some revelation" at hand, and expects an apocalyptic "second coming." But the new god will be different from the Christ child:

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Apocalypse of one kind or another is, in fact, the most consistent prediction of contemporary artists. Fifty years ago, the certainty of progress inspired many Utopian visions of the bliss in store for future generations. In their various ways, *News from Nowhere* (1891), *Looking Backward* (1888), *Erewhon* (1872) and *Back to Methuselah* (1921) all looked forward to the eventual triumph of human intelligence in some form of ideal state.

Today, visions of the future are less reassuring. *Brave New World* (1935), *1984* (1948), and *Love Among the Ruins* (1952) are nightmare visions of what things will be like if present trends are not arrested. H.G. Wells, whose prophetic vision of what science might accomplish for man culminated in the peaceful world state of *The Shape of Things to Come*, ended his literary career with *Mind at the End of Its Tether,* a book which argued that human life as we know it is soon to perish from the earth. Even the science comics assume that interplanetary life will merely offer enhanced opportunities for the sort of mayhem practised on earth.

The personal vision has become as pessimistic as the social. Tennyson hoped to meet his master face-to-face after he had "crossed the bar" of death; Browning professed to look forward to feeling the fog of death in his throat; but T.S. Eliot's vision of dissolution is less attractive:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

For all these reasons, the typical modern artist is a lonely man. Isolation and exile are characteristic themes of our literature. Throughout centuries of history, the pressures of convention, tradition, loyalty and community provided a meaningful context into which his vision

of human nature could be projected. Now that these have been largely dissipated, the artist has fallen back to the only reality available to him — himself. And, looking into himself (with the assistance of psychologists, neurologists, and anthropologists), he has found, not a rational microcosm such as the Elizabethans assumed, but an irrational and mysterious "id". It is this savage and frightening "reality" which many artists exploit as a means of shattering the comfortable stereotypes and half-truths of twentieth-century mediocrity. This is the reality which Joyce endeavoured to present in *Finnegan's Wake,* and which contrasts so oddly with the sharp impressions of physical appearances which Dickens evoked even when he was describing a fog.

Has the artist any answer to our dilemma? Most of them have thought that they had. Nevertheless, when one studies their "solutions" — Lawrence's "blood", Pound's social credit, Eliot's Christian society, Yeats' mysticism, and so on — it becomes evident that their diagnosis of the disease is more impressive than their proposed cure. The artist's business is with lived experience in all its concrete particularity. It is not his task to draw up blueprints for the future.

irving layton

CANADIAN POETRY: MODERN

The first thing to say about the new poetry is that it is not new. The trouble is that most Canadians are not aware of any kind of poetry in Canada — new or old. But within the past two or three decades there has been a most interesting and astonishing development in the field of poetry, despite the vast apathy of the Canadian public. That this should be so . . . may be accounted for by the fact that only just now, Canada is emerging from colonial status.

One might say, in all introspective honesty, that Canadians suffer from a colonial inferiority complex. They cannot really believe, although people have arisen to assure them, that Canadians are capable of producing first rate poetry, painting, or music. Instead they await approval from the British — or even American — critics. And then the cry is taken up by other Canadians. The Canadian poets, knowing this, still prefer to have their volumes published in London, or New York, or Chicago. They feel sure this is the stamp of approval, which will impress their apathetic fellow Canadians . . .

Our critics (with such notable exceptions as A.J.M. Smith) have served Canadian poetry badly. Without the least fear of contradiction, I say there is no critic in Canada capable of evaluating the new writing of the past three decades.

Here are my reasons for saying this: first, many of our critics have received their higher education in English colleges and universities. I call them Anglo-Canadians. When they return to teach in Canada, the viewpoint they hold is an English one. Therefore, they look down with condescension on the efforts of Canadian poets. Certainly they are not prepared to understand the life and vitality that surges through the minds of our contemporary poets. Secondly, there is a feeling on

the part of these university professors that Canadian literature is so insignificant that when they commence writing their world-shaking theses they overlook Canadiana. They write, instead, for the hundredth time, another volume about Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*; going through the fine metaphysics of the whale. This offers a large scope for the display of their talents.

Not only are the universities at fault . . . a very false idea of poetry is given to generation after generation of unfortunate and victimized pupils in our public and high schools as well. They are taught to believe that poetry can only be made about daffodils and stars, or the acceptable sentiments of nostalgia, wistfulness, and melancholy.

The real world of our fellow Canadians is something quite different, but you never get poetry telling the pupils something about the industrial world that has grown up around them . . . no poetry about strikes . . . about industrial dislocations. Actually, no realistic, contemporary, circumstantial poetry ever gets into our text books.

Why is it Canadians are not taught to read their own poets? For afte rall is said and done, there should be nothing more important for Canadians than to know the poetry being produced today . . . since that poetry which is alive and vital and good, is the reflection of the life that a majority of Canadians live. It reveals to them their own minds . . . the quality . . . the feel . . . the tang. There is no other way for Canadians to know what the sum and substance of their minds add up to unless they get it directly from the poets. They are the only ones qualified by their gifts and talents to tell the people. The scientist can't do it. The huckster won't. And neither will the politician. That is why there are artists in every generation and in every country. If Canadians exhibit an indifference to art, it only means they do not care aobut the road they are travelling.

There are two kinds of poetry: there is the poetry of the acceptable sentiments, and there is the poetry which is critical and exploratory. Most people stop at the first kind. The average man or woman who reads Byron's *"She walks in beauty like the night,"* or Wordsworth's *"My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky,"* feels a nice, steaming sensation about the heart. It is this that people mistake for the aesthetic emotion.

Here, of course, is where the schools are to blame. By the time the students have left the high schools they should know that good poetry is critical, exploratory . . . that really good poetry disturbs people,

shakes them up and breaks down certain habits and associations in their minds. They should know that disgust, hatred, violence and even vice are permissable roads to salvation. No one could *read* good poetry — Donne, Milton, Shakespeare — without knowing that. Yet our students leave not only high schools, but also colleges and universities, feeling that the poetry of acceptable sentiments, the familiar album-pieces, is really poetry. And if the modern poet has the audacity to use one or two four-letter words — which Shakespeare, Byron and Pope used before him — the genteel finger of reproach is immediately waved at him. This is not poetry, Canadians never use these words — such is the claim of these misguided youths. It is a libel, therefore, for a poet to use those four-letter words, without which it would be impossible to carry on a civilized conversation.

But these products of our modern educational system do not want to read this type of disturbing poetry — this poetry of the modern sensibility. Instead, they indulge themselves in what I call C. A. A. poetry, a large school of 'respectable' Canadian poetry of the Canadian Authors' Association. But this is *not* poetry. It is what is found in the Montreal Star and Gazette . . . poetry that is consoling, lovely, tender, and perfectly meaningless.

Modern poetry, I would say, began in Canada with the publication of *New Provinces* in 1936 under the leadership of A.J.M. Smith. This anthology introduced such new poets as A.M. Klein, Leo Kennedy, Robert Finch, F.R. Scott, and E.J. Pratt, who were incorporating the new techniques of Eliot, Pound, and Yeats. The new sensibility, contained in this book, and resulting from the First World War and the dislocation caused by the depression — such sensibility was expressed by rhythm and vocabulary: tempo and imagery. With the exception of E.J. Pratt, these poets did not find publishers until the active decade of the forties.

The newer poets of this decade, Dudek, Souster, Miriam Waddington, myself, and others, had been formed by the depression of the thirties and the Second World War — years of misery and tumult. Experiences of these years were in the marrow of our bones and when we came to write poetry, it was tough, realistic, and critical. We felt a society that was capable of condemning millions of people to unemployment . . . capable of producing war . . . a society in want of all values and all meaningful purpose in the satisfaction of the daily lives of its people; is a diseased society.

This is what the poets of the forties were complaining about.

Souster, stationed at an air base, wrote fierce and furious poetry . . . Dudek, working for an advertising agency, wrote that same kind of critical and bitter poetry . . . and so did I.

Of course, certain things that were troubling Klein, Scott, Smith, and Pratt were not troubling us. These earlier poets, writing in the magazine *Preview,* were still trying to decide whether this was a moral universe or not; the poets of the forties decided it was not. To speak of this being a moral universe created for the edification of mankind, just didn't make sense when we saw the countless inhumanities about us. We accepted the biological facts of the struggle for existence after seeing young boys riding the rods looking for jobs in the late thirties.

And so it went. One cherished conviction after another . . . religious, ethical, political, social . . . was subjected to a fierce criticism. The magazine *First Statement* was a direct result of this ambitious tirade against socicety. We of *First Statement* considered ourselves the Canadians. The *Preview* of Scott, Klein, and Page was looked upon as the cosmopolitan, sophisticated magazine, but somewhat alien. Between the two of us existed a healthy situation of rivalry and controversy . . . something that Canadian art needs more . . . as a stimulus.

Out of these two literary magazines, *Preview* and *First Statement,* came *Northern Review,* with John Sutherland at its head. This happened because *First Statement* had the printing press, and *Preview* had the talented writers. By the amalgamation of the two we thought we could — and did — edit a fine magazine. (Sometimes in a more dismal and morbid moment it occurred to me, as we were gathered together at editorial board meetings, that if a bomb should drop it would wipe out Canadian Literature for the next twenty-five years.)

At the end of the first six months of publication, a review of Robert Finch's poetry printed in this magazine alienated the *Preview* members and they withdrew from the editorial board. A year later there was further dissention in the ranks . . . due partially to Sutherland's religious conservatism, and the rest of the editorial board withdrew; thus leaving him in sole charge. Then Sutherland, since he controlled the only Canadian literary magazine, was able to say that there was no Canadian poetry being published in Canada. This, of course, was true, as Mr. Sutherland was not printing any.

With *Northern Review* hostile to our poetry, two new little magazines came into existence. One was *Contact* produced by Raymond Souster. It is a fellow like him, who works in a bank, goes home in

the evening, turns the crank of the mimeograph machine to produce his magazine, and puts out the money from his own pocket, that can make Canadians proud of their poets . . . and ashamed of themselves, for now I hear that he can not find fifty readers. Through *Contact* he has introduced contemporary French Canadian, German, Russian, and South American poetry — a veritable cultural exchange. The United Nations doesn't do any more than Raymond Souster, and they have a much larger budget.

The second of these avant-guarde publications was *Civ/n* in Montreal. It started out as a mimeograph sheet edited by Aileen Collins and several other working girls . . . who paid for the expenses out of their own pockets. Now, after the seventh issue, *Civ/n* is printed although financially unstable due to the apathy of the public.

During the past year, however, there has been a 'renaissance' in Canadian Literature, which bodes good for the future of Canada in the literary world. With the publishing of such books of poetry as F.R. Scott's *Events and Signals,* A.J.M. Smith's *A Sort of Ecstacy* in 1954, and several new volumes in the offing, as Louis Dudek's *Europe,* Canada's literary future looks exceptionally bright . . .

poetry

trevor goodger-hill

CHRISTMAS RECOLLECTIONS

I remember
past Christmases
With silver tinsel wrapped around
A shining sprucegreen tree;
Violent colours by the pound.

Happy dribbling children
clutch at a fat red man
And bribe him with candykisses
For a box of tin soldiers.

Santa forces a false rumble in his belly
And returns them,
each to his doting parents,
Who cherish their prodigal child
For twenty-one years.

christopher liebert

THE GOTHIC

It crystallized in the form of a Spanish rose
Fashioned of stone, and thrown on the shawl of sky:
However it is worth mentioning
That it was night and full moon.

Arches raised their brows slightly
In curved expression of wonder
And nave of church was immersed
In the oncoming waves of shadows.

Lonesome devils and dragons
Fell asleep on their roof-top posts
And bearded saints, leaning on the walls
Started to snore.

Time was so still, broad and aromatic
That the childish smile,
Still fluttering in the air, descended
Gently on the lips of the wax Madonna.

Now only candles, as candles usually do,
Without any apparent reason
Were shimmering quietly and silvery,
As tears on the girl's eyelashes.

Originally written in Polish by the author.

julius thau

OUR CIVILIZATION

Run-rush-hurry-flurry-faster — FLY !
"PRODUCTION" the keyword of economy.

Spur onward, produce — and more Queen's heads
To outdo John Canuck !

"Naw — no time for recreation," and so
Run-rush-hurry-flurry and-suddenly
— DIE!

george holmes

A MOMENT OF DELIGHT

It was like breaking out of a dense
Forest of douglas firs wet with new rain
And looking across a meadow
To see an unexpected rainbow gliding
Through a dark cloud.

Or absently turning on the radio
Without anticipating delight
And hearing for two minutes
A children's choir
Singing the spontaneous song
Of a happy wanderer . . .

The way a stranger invited me to step inside
And talked to me while I waited for you.
When I saw you coming downstairs
Her conversation droned away.
You looked so natural as you came near,
As though we'd done this for years.

Then I turned to the stranger to make some polite reply.

The rest of eternity can resume its course now.
The steel and concrete will grate and scream
In my brain.
Cynicism and the hollow men

Can sit in armchairs twenty stories high
And press buttons.
The tired mechanic can relax while he watches
A harlequin dance before a gingerbread house
And the mug who slugs the dame in the kisser . . .

douglas a. treherne

GRAPHIC

A picture takes a place,
In lines upon a face,
A landscape of dawn
Green and orange upon a lawn.

The colour shows a line,
Portrays displays in mime,
Of line, depth and grace
Quickly changing space.

w. h. rice

SELF-PORTRAIT

"...the baby spoke today
What did he say,
DA"

I

When the Sun shatters on my morning window-pane,
And the frost whorles a crazy spectrum
On my bedroom walls; red, violet and white.
When the warm life of my body drowses, first awakening,
I am male and animal; and I stretch
The sleep on fine wires to consciousness,
And it is fully dawn:
In me, and in the world.

The snow on my windowsill has piled up white,
But not quite white any more.
It is a city snow.
Smog and smoke have corrupted it and
Covered it with dust.

Each crystal morning brings a child's new expectation
In me. A new snow to cover the old,
A new dispensation to negate the negation.
But the dirt shows through.

II

Between the dawn and the dispensation,
A casual time,
neuter.
Between time's twin heads is
The ghost.
A time for tired eyes . . .
A slow circulation of minutes
A time suspended.

Between the clock's spreading thighs
Oozes one hour, one moment.
A time for death
A time for birth
A time for waiting . . .

Between the father and the son,
One moment in time.
Between death and birth,
The moment . . .
Eternal.

Before time and after time
Pregnant.

Oh Rose!

III

I saw the child
Standing wonder-eyed in the Art Museum.

This innocence
And eternal beauty,
One the other —

A truth, half glimpsed, reflected
The wonder in this child,
Eternal for the moment.

IV

A casual time . . .

I crossed an intersection, and looked
Up the mountain to the crucifix, and
My foot stepped on a stiff sparrow.

. . . at the party

He found us 'mongst the beer bottles,
And hovered over us; plumping his tartan breast
Before sitting down.

He carried his works in his mouth.

The Semite quivered,
A sponge with frantic eyes . . .
While the pseudo-sexual
Fingered the box of contraceptives
In his jacket pocket, and swore querulously.

I saw a poet standing in the corner,
Calling for a waltz on the gramaphone.
Wishing, halfheartedly, he could learn to dance.
He looked puzzled, and old.

He scratched his rectum with blunt finger,
Put on his hat and coat and
Called to his wife
Are you ready to go . . .

Twenty minutes later I saw him,
His hat and coat on and
His satchel full of books of poetry
Still waiting while she danced.
Ophelia wandered in and out the room
With illusions in her long blond strings,
Drowning in conversation.

While a man with slavic cast
And a black haired witch
Attacked an Irish jig with a recorder.
But they could not charm the snake out of it.

On the gramaphone
Stan Kenton probed neurosis
With his brass instruments.
And my head ached . . .

The wine was bad.

V

There was an oil painting . . .

I remember, I remember
Black water frothing through
An old stone lock.
A water-wheel with broken ribs,
Hanging moss trailing in the current
From brick foundations.
And cypress trees,
Lofting on the banks, catching
The green sunlight, and
Cooling it with vegetable breath.

BUT IT HAS NOT SNOWED FOR A LONG TIME:

. . . brown

Brown the countryside,
Fields of drifted dust
Spiked here and there with fenceposts
And shredded corn-stalks.
Dusttouched clouds, heavy over
Flat land

Heat . . .

A tree, anglearched
Leaning in the mudflats with ragged bark.
Ants, anciently busy, hoard
Remnents through rotted knotholes.

Brown . . .
Here, an old fishing line,
Frayed and clotted with mud
Interwoven in the dust and rushes.
A complex weave to no purpose,
No fishing here.

VI

January,

a grey dawn.
Hardbitten wind stinging sand and grit
Through the streets, and between the buildings.
Snow sifted thin on grey pavements.
A cruel month:
Numbed
Fingers catching at coat collar.

A cold dawn, not crystal.
A spectrum of greys,
And silences.
And it had not snowed . . .

I stood there, and cried aloud for snow,
To wash my feet in, to cleanse behind the ears
And the rigid hands, the nostrils and the eyes.
To open my mouth and catch with my tongue.

But it had not snowed.

It was grey, and silent, and not white.
No dispensation covered me,
There was no snow on my coat,
Just the smell of bad wine . . .

I turned homewards to wait . . . . . .

"I praise the child, for he has seen thee,
Where I have passed a lifeless tree."

edwin walters

THE MISCONCEPTION

The virgin stands
in righteous white
to hear the banns
read by the priest,

then slowly turns
and waits outside
triumphant in her
innocent pride.

At later date
the wedding ring
on nervous finger
slipped.

With righteous hands
she fumbles with
her clothes and slips
beneath stiff sheets.

(Little does she know
that winter isn't manifest
in the fall
of the first snow.)

jacques portier

MARIVAUDAGE... GRAPHOLOGIQUE !

Ame insaisissable, seule ton écriture
Va-t-elle révéler sur toi la vérité ?
Charmant griffonnage, miroir de ta nature,
Je vais donc l'étudier avec curiosité.

Analysons, des mots, tout d'abord la structure :
Ils sont horizontaux : trait de stabilité !
Ils sont bien séparés : facile est la lecture,
Les lettres arrondies, indiquent la bonté.

Diantre, voilà un M, d'une forte carrure
Et un T bien barré : signe de volonté ! —
De belles majuscules (et de noble stature) :
C'est que l'on a beaucoup de générosité !

Et tout ça se bouscule et court à vive allure.
Ne nous y trompons pas : c'est de l'activité.
Oh ciel ! Que vois-je là : une laide rature :
Aurait-on par hasard de la nervosité ?

Les lettres anguleuses affirment qu'elle est sûre
Mais un mot renversé, dit sa timidité ;
Un D bien dessiné, qu'elle aime la peinture,
Longue est la fin des E : quelle amabilité !

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Longue est la fin des E : quelle amabilité !

Arabesques fines, coquettes miniatures :
Cela prouve qu'elle est sensible à la beauté !
Et ces amours de J, splendides ciselures,
Et ces trois petits points, symboles de clarté.

L'écriture simple, sans une fioriture
Indique bien le goût de la simplicité,
Pourtant je vois un M qui a une parure
Rien de très alarmant, un peu de vanité !

Barre aigüe des T, finesse de gravure :
Esprit comme une dague et sensibilité.
Les A sont gras, dodus, disciples d'Epicure
Et montrent simplement de la sensualité.

Dessin bien affirmé : c'est l'esprit d'aventure
Majestueux déliés : sentimentalité
Les O sont bien fermés, presque sans ouverture :
Sacrifions le rêve à la réalité !

En somme tout cela, révèle une âme pure
Amoureuse avant tout de la sincérité.
Et il est bien heureux, que nos deux écritures
Montrent que nos deux âmes ont tant d'affinité !...

cubby marcus

POEM

The frogs sing at night in the stagnating water
disappearing slowly from a winter-sodden field.
In a two-block world starting from one end
of a muddy puddly veldt and terminating
before you
they cry. Singly or in unison.
From a stillness in which the only sound
is the twinkling of stars
a crescendo of life rises
and hangs.
The frogs at night sing —
in their soggy stagnant
two-block universe.

joseph colucci

GRAY WORDS

We look from the picture-window's wrong side.
No matter, since the neighbour is a twin.
The pleasure-trip becomes a weary ride,
The sinecure becomes a chore to win.

Unheard, the spud-faced woman whispers words
That slowly fall and fade like early snow.
Hands folded rest upon her apron's birds,
Dry fingers form frail plants that cannot grow.
"The days are variant visions of unchange,
There's always something gray about the sky."
Outside, the windblown world lies silver-strange,
Deserted pavements lie somewhat awry.

When the gray days end long eons will but find
The sunshine is not change but state of mind.

trevor goodger-hill

FOR HELEN

No mad fool
or dreamer, I,
but a searcher
of the sky.

Through the misty
deepening night
the cosmos spreads
its glittering light.

To the stars
my eyes are yearning,
celestial bodies
slowly turning

on their axes
overhead:
a single pattern
to be read.

prose

tevia abramovitch

THE TRETCHIKOFF EXHIBITION

Montreal witnessed an apparent cultural renaissance recently, when thousands flocked to view an exhibition of works by the South African painter, Vladimir Tretchikoff. Although this exhibition enjoyed popular success throughout its North American tour, nowhere have more misguided hosannahs been raised to the artist than in this French-flavoured city.

To discover for myself the reason for such unprecedented alarm over an artistic endeavor, I went to see this widely advertised exhibition in the modern salon of a downtown department store. Entering the thickly-carpeted and sophisticated salon, I became immediately aware of two things: one was an elegant strain from Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto; the other, an exotic and almost photographic painting of a semi-nude woman. A pseudo-cultural atmosphere was thus contrived in which one could easily become favourably disposed toward the exhibition.

Generally speaking, I found the exhibition appealing, not because of its artistic greatness, but rather because of its theatrical and commercial techniques. Such eye-appealing techniques included spotlights playing up the dullest colours to a dazzling brilliance; the slick, overdramatic, and highly naturalistic treatment of portraiture in particular and subject-matter generally; and the calculated application of bright colour direct from the tube (à la Van Gogh, but lacking this master's expressive genius). Beneath all this showmanship, one could nevertheless detect a proficiency in the manual skill of the artist. However, the point I wish to stress is that despite all these techniques and skills the exhibition failed to fulfill the requirements of true artistic expression.

In order to determine just where the artist has failed, I propose to examine several of his paintings individually. First, however, it is necessary to establish some generally accepted standard as a criteria. At this point one may argue that there are many qualitative truths of art with no absolute standard being acceptable, and that the ultimate appeal of a work is to the senses on a purely personal level. Yet in the final analysis, we *do* find a certain standard or body of generally accepted truths — based upon tradition and education — that are characteristic of, and fundamental to all true works of creative expression. Upon serious deliberation I think many would accept, as an important criteria of a good work of art, an artist's fresh vision or new insight into our world of experience. Such a criteria could imply a new conceptual view of such experience through the pictorial elements, but it most certainly presupposes the uniqueness and vitality in the completed work. At the very least, this criteria would include the most basic requirement — that of pleasantness in art. (The term pleasant is used here in the Scholastic sense to include a work that may disturb or offend; the main consideration being, that it give joy in the "knowledge of the object" itself.)

In Tretchikoff's *Prisoner of War,* a uniqueness such as just described, was noticeably lacking. The painting depicts, quite naturalistically, a weary-eyed and pathetic prisoner staring through a barbed-wire fence, with his pictured thoughts of home blending with the horizon. At first I was attracted by the delicate handling of colour and meticulous drawing. Contemplating upon this work for some time, however, I found I was gaining no new or unique experience (conception, if you will) from the subject-matter or pictorial elements. Rather, I found myself conjuring up my own thoughts and images about prisoners of war (having gleaned these through various forms of mass media) and forgetting for the moment the content of the painting itself.

Thus we reach a point where the spectator, because of the failings of the artist, is waylayed from contemplating the art object as an end in itself. It is precisely at this point in the appreciation of a work of art that the unwary spectator may mistake familiarity with authentic aesthetic emotion. The sentimenal hit parade tune, that acts as an excuse for most to call up a fund of nostalgic memories and feelings, is illustrative of what is meant here. Perhaps this observation explains the popular success of Tretchikoff's works.

In a painting called *Resurrection,* I found the same ephemeral treatment as in *Prisoner of War. Resurrection* is a depiction of a saintly, yet, unmistakably sensual soul, horizontally rising from the dead body of a young woman. I found the immediate appeal in this work in the romantic possibilities of the subject-matter itself, and not in the artistic interpretation of that subject-matter. This painting, taken seriously, would seem to preach that art is subject-matter, which it most decidedly is not. Subject-matter may certainly be important at the start of the creative process, but it is the artist's creative imagination, imposed upon the subject-matter, that determines the artistic quality of the work. In other words, art, if it is good, transcends subject-matter. As Bach's *B Minor Mass* transcends the liturgical mass of the Church, so does Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* transcend the mythological House of Thebes.

I could have forgiven all in *Resurrection* and *Prisoner of War,* as well as in many of his other works, had there been a strong fundamental sense of formal order and unity among the various pictorial elements. I mean by this, the joy, the pleasantness, the elemental satisfaction that a spectator has, when he intuitively knows that one more stroke of the brush could disrupt the whole unique relationship between rhythm, mass, light, shade, space and colour. Even a second visit to the exhibition failed to give me cause for forgiveness.

Blue Monday, the artist's literal depiction of his own experience in dejected mood at his studio, was too immature to be taken seriously. Again the artist exploited the emotional possibilities of subject-matter, to the exclusion of aesthetic requirements mentioned earlier. Moreover, the slick effect, from the attempt of dramatic naturalism through eye-catching colour, is an obvious sign that Tretchikoff relied on manual skill or technique to cover up his failings in true creativeness.

This painting may titillate the senses of the romantically inclined; but it does not tend toward artistic expression, which can only be achieved with the conscious partial extinction of the artist in the finished work. True artistic expression is a quality to be strived for and, when reached, should be capable of standing on its own merits when viewed, separate and distinct from the artist who created it.

Whereas *Blue Monday* is indicative of the artist's immaturity, the *Dying Swan* offers hope that Tretchikoff may overcome his present stage of theatre-commercialism and ultimately achieve artistic maturation. In the *Dying Swan* I was aware of a sensitive line which slowly

loops and tremors in a continuous falling motion, coming finally to rest in the fingertips of the ballerina. The obvious preoccupation here with design and continuity of line — beginning with the contour of a real swan at the top of the painting, and ending in the graceful finale of the ballerina — tends toward a pleasing, well ordered and unique work.

Three paintings called *Spring, Desolation,* and *Fire* — all with basically the same wooded landscape as their cores — give me cause to wonder whether they are the artist's objective images for life, death, and the fire of purgatory. Again, the criticism I have put forth with reference to his other works is valid here. Suffice it to say here that all three works depend for their popular success upon the exacting detail of the central tree-stumps, the exciting colour, the aid of effective spotlighting, and the crude bark frames.

With the twentieth century trend in art appreciation shifted, from the romantic and sentimental emphases of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the apprehension of the whole work (technique, content, form, mood) as a unity, the Tretchikoff paintings would seem to defy this trend. In the face of this fact, however, it is precisely these pleasant escapist qualities — to the exclusion of other basic artistic requirements — that has apparently been responsible for his great popular appeal. Can it be that the Neo-Romantic and Victorian spirits still haunt the minds of people?

In this paradoxical situation lies the crux of the matter. For those who persistently claim that art should be nothing more, nothing less, than what is easily communicable, naturalistically pleasing to the senses, and emotionally uplifting (disregarding any feeling for *possible* lack of balance, uniqueness, new insight, vitality, design, and overall unity among other qualities): then Tretchikoff has for them, achieved true art. On the other hand, there are the others.

irene skarlet

IN THE TWILIGHT OF GLORY

"Poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; it should strike the reader as wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance. Its touches of beauty should never be half-way, thereby making the reader breathless, instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of imagery, should like the sun, come natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight;" so John Keats, a young romantic poet and Byron's contemporary, wrote in one of his letters in the beginning of the 19th century. Byron's finest and most famous lyric "So we'll go no more a-roving" has achieved the demands of this shrewd criticism.

More than a hundred years ago, during Byron's stay in Italy, in his exile, this beautiful short poem was composed together with the fourth canto of *Childe Harold,* the short burlesque poem *Beppo,* and the first two cantos of *Don Juan,* which are his best works. Venice, greenest island of the poet's imagination, as he called it himself, was his refuge. Due to his love of ruins, the signs of decay in Venice were not disappointing to him. Venice was one of those places which, before he approached, he knew what it was like. He delighted in this ancient historical city of Merchant and Moor, Portia and Desdemona; for at every turn he could encounter the ghost of Shakespeare. Venetian palazzi, beautifully painted houses, and the gloomy gaiety of the slowly gliding gondolas along the water-paved streets seemed to be doubly charming to him. This city produced a great effect on his imagination. The rarities of Venice, associated with his emotions, suited the mood of this period in his life: he became studious in the day and dissolute in the evening. He threw himself

into the whirl of the amusements, seeking pleasures and excitement to clear the sphere of his tempestuous spirit. But the Winter Carnival — a great season in Venice — soon exhausted him, and when Lent with its sacred music came, Byron composed this short memorable poem and sent it to England as the third paragraph of a letter to his friend Thomas Moore:

"So we'll go no more a-roving,
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And Love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon."

These twelve simple lines epitomize the reformation of Byron, a prelude to his future life, "no more a-roving". Each word, each period in this poem breathes a mysterious charm of his past pleasures and reveals the weariness of his heart and soul. It strikes the reader with its movement, balance, and strength and lends the magic of sincerity, simplicity, and beauty. "So we'll go no more a-roving" is a bewitching poem, for it produces an overwhelming effect on every reader of any age, and is enchanting even to those whose spirit is not attuned to hear lyric poetry. It is the pearl of Byron's great poetry.

john millons

VIGNETTE - A SUMMER EVENING

He noticed her as soon as he boarded the bus, a young girl freshly attired in a summer suit of soft blue. She was sitting in the corner, up behind the driver; a girl not beautiful in the trite sense of the word, yet something made her instantly interesting — her piquant face; her figure, graceful and elfin.

9.50 The garbled voice from the despatcher's box sounded out over the loudspeaker: "Bus for Riverside now leaving from Track Number Five . . . Le bus pour Riverside départ sur Voie Numéro Cinq". The driver geared into reverse and backed from the departure platform, changed, and the bus drew away from the terminal into the city streets. Neon lights were already beginning to blink garishly against the background of summer dusk, and high on the mountain, way above the dusty, limpid thoroughfares, the red beacon of a radio mast shone out its symbol of warning.

From his seat on the side, the young man looked, slowly and with obvious pleasure, at the figure of the girl . . . nineteen, twenty perhaps, he thought . . . wonder where she lives . . . probably going to the end of the line, which will leave me well adrift.

The girl's light summer clothing contoured every curve of her young body, imbuing it with a sensuous virginity which stirred the young man's appetite. She sensed his gaze, and a touch of shyness heightened the colour of her cheeks. After a fleeting glance in his direction, as if in reassurance, she half-turned away to look out the window at the bridge lights flashing by overhead. He glanced away, and, after a few minutes, saw from the corner of his eye that she looked again toward him. A suggestion of a smile crossed his face, and the reflection appeared in hers.

Through the delicate lace of her left glove the young man had already noticed that signs of betrothal were absent. Must be unattached, he thought — too damned early for a girl to be going home if she's been on a date. Not so good when there are fifty stops on this route, and I get off at number two. Chances are pretty remote.

The bus slipped on into the deepening shadows of the night, away from the city and into the suburbs beyond. Sidelong glances half-inquisitive, half-hesitant, crossed and recrossed the intervening space — never the direct stare, just the gentle flicker and the phantom smile as if in mutual recognition of a private game.

Out on the highway now, and the driver flicked off the lights, plunging the bus into darkness. In the young man's brain revolved many and one fantasy solutions to this dream-like situation, but reality eluded him . . .

On the outskirts of Saint-Croix the bus ground to a halt at the railway crossing. As a long freight train rumbled slowly past, the young man was able to see her face, silhouetted in the flashing light of the crossing signal. Once more he found the tantalizing glimmer of laughter on her lips, the hint of a repressed smile.

The crossing gates lifted and the vehicle eased slowly forward through the town. The impossibility of the situation and his lost search of a solution made the young man turn glumly to survey the wending couples sauntering hand-in-hand along the tree-lined avenue. A fragment of a theme . . . "Au Clair de la Lune" . . . drifted in from a cafe as the bus cruised by, to be lost a moment later in the myriad sounds of changing gears and engine purring. The early evening breeze through the open window caught at the girl's chestnut hair, stirred it softly, agonizingly . . .

Now, as they rounded the Lakeshore Boulevard the light in the girl's eyes grew unrecognizing, and her expression changed to one which told the young man nothing. He watched, wondering.

The driver called stop number one, and the girl held her ticket and got ready to leave. Hell, thought the young man, she lives close by after all. Hastily he reached for his ticket, and walked to the door behind her. His knees began to tremble slightly. I'll make it yet, he vowed. He could sense that she knew he was getting off too. As she stepped down to the sidewalk, the girl tripped and half-stumbled. The young man reached out a steadying hand beneath her elbow, supporting her. She turned to him with a smile of thanks.

Behind them, they heard the hiss of the closing doors. The bus gathered speed, and passing with a final flash of brightness, sped into the night, committing them to themselves.

The young man stood close to the girl, spoke quietly. A moment of conversation . . . a coy, assenting nod, and footsteps in unison clicked away in the summer night.

The lights of the boulevard reflected eerily in the waters of the lake. Outboard motors put-putted in the distance. The fresh evening breeze wafted gently shoreward . . .

shirley schiff

THE MONTREAL POET: IRVING LAYTON

Poetry in Canada has come of age, and to a few conscientious contemporary Canadian poets must go the credit for bringing this art to its present level of maturity.

Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, and Raymond Souster are three living Canadian poets who have fought fervently for the poetry of their country. They have tried to eliminate the indifference with which Canadians regard their own culture. And to judge by the number of books published recently by Canadian poets, and the reception accorded these, their efforts have not been entirely in vain. Of the three, Mr. Layton's efforts have been particularly noteworthy.

Born in Montreal in 1912, of Jewish parentage, Irving Layton received his early education at a local high school and completed his formal education at McGill University. Radical in his views during the thirties, Layton was not unlike James T. Farrel and Dos Passos in their sympathy towards the proletarian cause. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Layton entered the Canadian army as an officer.

It was in the early forties that he met Dudek. The two became friends, and combined their creative efforts in an attempt to prove to Canadians that the home poet had much to communicate about the reality of life and society in their country — that the home poet was deserving of a place in the cultural life of Canada. Many of their poems were published in *First Statement, Contact, Origin,* and *Northern Review*; literary magazines that shared the belief of Layton and Dudek in the need for a home grown culture. Their poetry was sincere in the dim hope that somehow it would reach the ears of some Canadians. To further this end, they edited a book called *Canadian*

Poems (1850-1952), and along with Souster, published a book of their own works in 1952 entitled *Cerberus*. Among Layton's other works are: *The Black Huntsman, Love The Conqueror Worm, The Long Pea-Shooter,* and *In The Midst of My Fever.*

A lecturer in modern poetry at Sir George Williams College, Layton's judgments on contemporary poetry have been made with a great deal of sensitivity and accuracy. His critical insight has laid bare, even to the most unresponsive student, the meanings behind such masks of the obscure as T.S. Eliot. In his never-ending attempt to make Canadians aware of their cultural wasteland, Layton has taken heart and interest wherever he has come upon new talent among his students; encouraging them to write poetry and offering constructive criticism to their efforts.

He has, moreover, addressed many student groups and literary societies, giving freely of his time and energies. In these talks, Layton reveals himself to be an astute critic of poetry, of literature, and of life.

Physically, he looks more like a wrestler than a poet. He is thick-set, with a square face, flat nose, and black hair. But his deepset, intelligent eyes betray with expressiveness the man who can think and write seriously. Yet Layton is as harsh as his face. In his poetry he attempts often to shock — which he does skilfully — through profanity and bawdy jokes. Because he is a crusader against the evils in our society, the profanity is quite appreciable.

Layton is somewhat Rabelaisian; experimenting, shocking, bombasting — it is a fight for the recognition of reality as it exists. He is against gentility and the puritanical streak that chokes true life; he is against hypocrisy, fakery and falseness. He strikes out at cultural aridity and obtuse commercialism wherever he sees it.

Allied to the violence is the beauty by which every poet must stand or fall. The beauty in the powerful and precise images of his lines, mark Layton as a true poet. Consider these stanzas from three different poems of *The Long Pea-Shooter*:

> . . . In this first marriage blaze of passion,
> Could heat the red juice in my veins
> As you do.
>
> Yet even you, all-puissant goddess,
> And your bewitched minions
> Must scrape the oozy mud of the seafloor
> For squids and periwinkles
>
> To nourish me thereon . . .

. . . Their white ashes combed by fierce winds
Like the streaming hairs of frenzied anchorites,
The yea-sayers of hammered conviction;
And because thereby, decked out in green and gold,
She gains a greater glory . . .

. . . And at that, two sick ravens flew
From my companion's eyes, curtsied
As only ravens can, then grew
Small, smaller than a pepper seed;
Crooked fowls that have flown from hell
I saw their trace on his black lapel . . .

In the *Prologue To The Long Pea-Shooter,* and in *Literary Smoothie,* he attacks superficial contemporary poets and critics; shunning the idea that true poetry can be created fashionably. The experiment of poetry is a permanent one, and has a deep and lasting meaning. To Layton, poetry is true experience in itself and should be treated as such. But let us hear it from the poet in his own words, from the *Prologue*:

A friend tells me I must not write
About the workers and their sad plight,
That poetry like dress admits of fashion
And this is not the year for passion.
He thinks that the times will change: tomorrow
The critic nay approve of sorrow,
And anger be no blemish in a verse
Which may today neither taunt nor curse.
For now lampooners, themselves grown sick,
Prefer poets with a touch of colic
Who'll speak in soft, deflated tones
That menace no one's sleep or bones . . .

and in these two stanzas of *Literary Smoothie*:

The soirees, the readings at the B.B.C.
For — you re-assured us — an exciting fee;
And which poet's fame or reputation
Was going up and down like a stock quotation.

But rather, wishing to earn your bread
Like an honourable warrior by your pen
You wrote two poems each day and three . . .
Someone tactlessly brought up Milton . . .

In the poem *Young Man In Earnest,* is presented the problem of

the poet who is recognized neither financially nor socially. The poem is consciously written in ballad style, using incremental repetition, and is infused with the balladeer's immense patience and quiet hope:

> ... But what will you eat, my reckless young man?
> What will you eat, my man?
> This wart on my wrist will serve me for food
> I've another on my thigh that's equally good:
> The calluses on my feet I can not show
> As I race against Death to make them grow.
> And away he ran, and away he ran.

In *Lines on Myself* one detects this same mood of resignation:

> Next I loved poetry,
> Though knew the poets lie;
> I sometimes loved the sun,
> Clouds and thoughtless children
>
> All mercurial things:
> Streams, air, bright-coloured wings.
> I hated cruelty.
> The world's well rid of me.

In *Veteran,* he is soft and satirical:

> As he crawled past
> the service station
> his wrecked torso
> bobbing upanddown
> crazily
> like a bust spanner,
> the attendant
> when they were nearly
> abreast
> hailed him
> from the pumps:
> "How goes the war, Tim?"
>
> The cripple
> turned his green face,
> grinned,
> and for rejoinder
> lengthened one foot
> behind
> the other.

These quiet poems show insight into human foibles. One senses in them a deep understanding fused with pathos and sentiment. These new elements found throughout *The Long Pea-Shooter* mark an

advance in depth of thought over Layton's earlier volumes.

In the shorter poems of *The Long Pea-Shooter* we find, with pointed wit, a great deal of shrewd insight into the pretentiousness of our conservative and conventional society. A good example is to be found in the poem, *Sensibility.* Here is evoked the poet's disgust with those who would pseudo-intellectualize in order to successfully consummate an affair with a woman:

> He lifted up the hem
> of her dress,
> but being an intellectual
> and something of a painter
> he quickly let it fall
> again, saying
> with an abruptness
> that dismayed her:
> I never did care
> for Van Dycks!

Sometimes Layton's cynical approach is misdirected. Such is the case in *O.B.E.,* where Layton, in order to criticize the gentility and false manners of an English noble lady, describes the delicacy with which she stratches her rectum. One may well remember Dante, who said, *Elascia Pur Grattar Dov'e Regna !* (Let them scratch where it itches!)

The Long Pea-Shooter shows a considerable growth in the poetic attitude and technique of Layton. If compared with *In the Midst of My Fever* one can easily distinguish the difference. In the first-named collection, it is evident that he is lashing out vindictively at the exasperating mental and physical habits of the middle class Canadian: in the second volume he is less witty and more serious in his treatment. But for all the violence of *The Long Pea-Shooter,* it is mellowed and more mature.

His earlier works of the *Black Huntsman* and *Love the Conqueror Worm,* although honest and sincere, are pessimistic, and they appear to accept futility as their philosophy. These poems were written during the war years, and the futility is therefore understandable. Now his approach is more affirmative and he seems to have reached a keen understanding of *la condition humaine.*

Layton is a young poet, and one feels that his best work lies before him. Whatever that work consists of, it will be true to his avowed aim of sincerity.

f. c. n.

A LAST TRIBUTE

I

The fog was sweeping into the harbour as Greg approached the bridge. Would he get there first? No matter. But still it was far better to forget the disappointment of an hour ago. Yet the evidence was there in his hand as he clenched and unclenched his fist. He pushed his thumb against the stone, and the ring, barely large enough for his small finger, turned around and around.

His footsteps echoed on the hollow stones of the bridge; and vivid flashes of hoofbeats from a calash danced through the night in the park. As the calash paused, that evening, the occupants looked out at the city and the crowded lights, and confessed their love for each other . . . then the fog was upon him.

But the myriad sounds spelt a city still awake. The ships in the harbour, as they crept about, uttered their throaty plea to danger . . . the noisy laughter floated out of the saloon by the coal dock . . . from a corner far away, came the hoarse cry of the boy with the late edition . . . the shrill whistle of the peanut vendor was still calling to him . . . how he remembered the peanuts — an excuse, at first, for them to sit together . . . the rattle of garbage pails . . . the trickle of sewers . . . the hound barking a death far off . . . the gnashing grind of gears, as the novice in the driver's seat sought to impress his whore . . . a car, its motor roaring, climbed the embankment and rumbled across the bridge. As it passed, Greg closed his eyes to escape the harsh glare of the lights.

II

There had been joys that afternoon. The expectations for the

evening had thrilled him when he had set out to buy the ring. After many hours and footsteps, the kindly keeper of the jewel shop showed him one that he would adjust if it turned out to be the wrong size. It must fit. It must fit her! It couldn't be wrong!

He had had every indication of certainty. They had planned the future together. The little cottage by the plant where he worked was still not rented. They would live there, until he became established, and then they would move to the country. There would be children. He had been welcome in her home. Dinner on Sunday was followed by a walk in the park, except when the rain made them sit together and listen to the radio or to the records from her sister's collection.

Those weeks of his life had been the happiest he had known. A month ago, he had promised himself, that today would be the time he would give her the ring. The moment had come. What had he done wrong?

To be alone. To be alone and not to share the happiness of life. Yes, he still loved . . .

III

Greg was at the zenith of the bridge. The steel cables cut out through the fog and carried the bridge's weight across to the mainland. With the closing of the theatres, a steady stream of cars was leaving the city.

He stopped, gripped the railing, and stood there for a moment, alone. He could taste the soot bellowing from the ships in the harbour below.

Greg wrenched the ring from his finger, held it to his lips for an instant, and let it slip away . . . slowly . . . gently . . . to the depths below . . . a last tribute.

The rains came, filling and overflowing the gutters, flooding the walks, and running down the bridge in streamlets.

joseph colucci

THE WORST IS NOT

'The worst is not
So long as we can say, "This is the worst." '
King Lear

The splenetic humidity of the hot summer's night pulsed violently in the neat bedroom, relaxing the starched curtains, oppressively weighting the bedclothes. Suddenly, the air seemed to hover around him like a thick, tormenting perfume and he found himself in a dream.

The road ahead of him did not curve, it zig zagged in jagged fashion, forming acute angles. The land around him, treeless and grassless, tinged with reddish and yellowish earth, rose at intervals in black humps. Now he was walking off the road, heading towards one of the humps. Two red birds, large as hawks, swooped low towards him, then, a few feet above him, rose sharply into a glinting, gray sky. The earth under his feet was black and hard and the sound of his footsteps reverberated in the emptiness.

Above the black slate on the hot hill he could see the air dancing in grayish wraiths. The hill covered a cave whose opening was only partly hidden by a shining yellow rock. He stooped to look in. But the rock was at such an angle that only one side of the entrance-way was visible to him — a gray-green wall faced him. He tugged at the rock and felt it give slightly. He strove harder, but the rock would move only an imperceptible degree. His efforts caused him to sweat, his hands slipped around the sharp edges of the rock and began to bleed. His breath seared his throat and he was about to give up, when the rock suddenly became top-heavy and tumbled end over end with echoing explosions down the hard hillside.

He staggered into the entrance-way and faced a grayish darkness. Slowly his eyes began to accustom themselves to the semi-gloom. He noted a low wooden table, some faded newspapers on the floor — a white-marbled floor — and in a corner, a shape. He entered and the shape rose. He looked into his own face.

A loud clanging noise made him turn. A gate of iron bars slid from the ceiling into recesses in the floor. He was cut off from the entrance-way. The shape uttered words, but he did not hear them. His twin's face, pale and strained, now slowly faded in the grayness.

Mr. Scarola, his music teacher, was beside him, singing "Le Veau d'Or" in altiloquent style. At the words *'et c'est Satan qui mène le bal'* Mr. Scarola slowed down and articulated deliberately. The aria ended suddenly and the teacher waved his arms at the student.

"Ecco come si fa. That is how you do it," he shouted.

The student pointed to the bars. "We can't get out," he shouted in turn, for the cave seemed to be filled with a harrowing, mechanical, roaring noise.

"What?" shouted the teacher. And disappeared.

The cave was listing, rocking like a harassed lifeboat. "Mr. Scarola!" he shouted, "get me out!" He couldn't hear his own words.

Sotto voce, executive suite, chairman of the board, to govern, to control, administer and pull strings, sit in the chair, show the way, alla capella con brio vibrato, sforzando sforzando sforzando sforza sforza, this is the way the world ends not with a gong but a zither, set the primer, the long long primer, the great great primer, the small small pica, the piecea pie, the leetle leetle pie and the nonpareil, la lala! bravo bravissimo fortunatissimo into the telephone book rode the six hundred, six hundred, six hun . . . He was in another dream.

He came down the carpeted stairs from his bedroom and stopped at kitchenette entrance. His parents were seated at the table, eating. A shadow darkening the white table-cloth caught his gaze. He looked up and saw a body hanging from the ceiling. It hung there, turning slightly, swaying a little over the bright white table-cloth and the plain brown breakfast dishes.

He wanted to utter a cry, but noticing his parents' apparent indifference he went to his place. The shadow touched his cereal bowl and slowly withdrew. He looked into his father's large, gray, somber face, but the parent's eyes remained fixed on his food. He turned to meet his mother's thin, bitter features, but she, too, kept her gaze

downward. He felt ashamed, as if his noticing the body was a sinful act. He began to eat.

After a few minutes he could resist no longer. Keeping his face down, he tried to turn his gaze upwards to obtain some glimpse of the body. He saw the shoes and the ankles. The shoes were brown and pointed; the point brightly reflected the light. They were a young man's shoes, he decided. But the ankles, naked where the socks had slipped down, were caked with mud.

And now, a little flame of terror began to burn in his mind, for the sight of the shoes, swaying in mid-air, and the dirty ankles suggested an overwhelming obscenity, a state of degeneration beyond his comprehension. He looked down hastily and began to eat very quickly, swallowing large mouthfulls of cereal. Resolutely, he tried to concentrate his attention on the food before him. His parents continued to eat, paying no attention to him or to the body.

He now thought to trick his parents into noticing the hanging body. He began to whistle a sad tune. And when his father suddenly looked up in disapproval the son quickly pointed to the body with his fork. But his father's lips tightened angrily and the son bowed his head.

And then the body began to bleed. First, one drop of blood fell, spreading over the linen table-cloth, and splattering one drop on the boy's plate. (In the dream, at certain intervals, he was a boy.) Another drop fell on his mother's dish, and a large dark-red drop splattered on the edge of his father's dish.

The parents continued eating while terror and panic spread within him. His gaze went higher, higher, until he looked into the body's face. It hung there, above him, gray-white, with the revolting indifference of unconsciousness. Then he screamed, for it was his own face.

He woke.

His father's large bulk almost filled the narrow kitchenette as he sat at the table waiting for the eggs which Leon's mother was about to bring from the main kitchen. Leon took his place beside his father.

"Good morning, Dad." He tried to keep the weariness and edgy uncertainty out of the greeting.

Leon's father looked up from the paper and grunted a greeting. "You look like hell this morning," he added.

"I don't feel very well," the son answered. "Had a miserable night. And besides, I must admit, I'm a little nervous."

His father looked up. "Now, look Leon. I know I should have briefed you a little more about your position and your duties. But you're my son, the president's son, the owner's son. You understand? You're not there to be liked or disliked. You're at the plant to run it alongside me. It's the largest printing plant in Canada; it's mine, and it will be yours. All you have to remember is to make a decision and stick to it, taking all the responsibility for the consequences, good or bad."

Leon's mother entered. A harassed smile played at the ends of her thin lips, as she served the eggs. She turned to her son. "Lizzie hopes you like the eggs. It's a cheese omelette like your father's."

Leon nodded absently, observing his father had more to say.

"Leon, you've had a lot more schooling than I've had. McGill, Lausanne, Sorbonne. Frankly, I don't know what you got out of all those art degrees. Mother often told me you were writing, or painting, or even singing. I want you to realize that running our printing plant and owning it will not give you much time for arts and hobbies. It's a full-time responsibility. If you want to sing, you can join the church choir."

Leon reddened. "My singing teacher in Geneva thought I could try for something more serious. He said in a couple of years I could try at La Scala."

The father leaned his big frame forward. The huge body seemed to cover the table. "Leon, let's not discuss it now. You're starting at the plant this morning and you've got to set your mind to business."

The two men continued the rest of the meal in silence. When they were almost finished the mother rose and pressed the chauffeur's buzzer.

Later father and son entered the office and the older man gravely performed the introductions. These continued for more than two hours before Leon's father took the son to the room which had been freshly prepared for him. The father pointed out the tape-recorder and the pertinent library.

"Well, your secretary will be giving you some work shortly," his father stated. "I've got work of my own to do."

He stepped out of the room and gently shut the door. As the latch slid into its recess, Leon heard a loud, clanging noise.

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